

Can you help develop a dental workforce in Liberia?

There are significant problems accessing dental care in the UK, but in Liberia, a country in West Africa with a population of 5 million people, there are currently only seven dentists registered with the Liberian Medical and Dental Council.

Liberia has no dental training facilities, and the acute shortage of dental workforce



poses a serious public health problem. The effects of oral disease for most people in Liberia is profound, causing pain, discomfort, disfigurement and even death. The impact of poor oral health is far-reaching across the population and has severe consequences not only for health, but also the economic and social development of Liberia. Importantly, with access to basic and regular dental care, these consequences can be avoided.

Trinity Dental Clinic (pictured) was established in 2008 at ELWA hospital in the capital city Monrovia to help meet these needs. In 2019, the clinic expanded to a new purpose-built facility with eight clinical rooms and 20 staff, mostly trained 'in house'. The clinic also periodically sends out teams on 2–3-day visits to rural areas (an outreach session also pictured) as many people in Liberia live in the countryside, with no access to the clinic. But the aim is to do more.

To further develop a dental workforce and ensure greater access to dental care across the entire country, Trinity Dental Clinic is establishing a formal two-year dental therapist training course, starting in September 2022, with the aim of graduating eight dental therapy practitioners (DTPs) by July 2024. Other students will join the programme in subsequent years. Upon graduation, graduates will have completed a

two-year diploma course, and be awarded certification by Cuttington University, a partner university in Liberia with academic support provided by Peninsula Dental School, University of Plymouth, UK.

They will also be licensed by the Liberia Medical and Dental Council to then return to their hometowns around Liberia. They will be fully equipped using Dentaaid-supplied field kits. Clinically, they will not only have the full support of the clinic, but they will also be able to generate their own income as they continue to work with patients in the rural areas.

In the longer term, the aim of this programme is to provide training for a larger number of students through the construction and equipping of a bespoke Therapist School building to meet the growing need for dental practitioners within Liberia.

More information and ways to support the project can be found on the project website: www.ldts.org or by contacting the project lead Dr Simon Stretton-Downes OBE BDS directly via email: simon.stretton-downes@sim.org. Dr Stretton-Downes has been leading this project since 2017 and was awarded an OBE for services to dentistry in Liberia in 2021.

Croydon orthodontist celebrates 50 years at practice

Specialist orthodontist John Sawyer (pictured) has just celebrated half a century of working at Croydon Orthodontic Practice.

The practice was founded in 1972 in South Croydon by specialist orthodontist Pat McDonogh, and is now situated next to the train station in Blunt Road. It has cared for more than 100,000 people in the Croydon area.

Dr Sawyer said: 'I qualified as a dentist in 1969 and then travelled to Australia to do my Masters in Orthodontics. When I returned to the UK in 1972 I answered an advertisement in the *British Dental Journal* and the rest as they say is history!

'The orthodontic landscape was very different in those days. Back then there were

Consultants in hospitals, a few specialist orthodontists, but most care was provided by GDPs. We also didn't get paid until the end of treatment – perhaps an interim payment of £50 or so but this meant we worked as GDPs too to make ends meet.'

After 50 years at the same practice, John still enjoys coming into the practice. He said: 'I love working with the kids – that hasn't changed. Fifty years may sound a long time but it has flown by – we are a social bunch and Croydon Orthodontic Practice has always been a happy place. It is not uncommon for me to now treat the grandchildren of some of my first patients – that makes me feel a little mature but also delighted to have helped three generations of the same family.'

